



## **Future of an Ageing Population Project: Public Meeting - Margate**

**12 November 2014**

### **Context**

As part of the evidence gathering for the Foresight Project on the Future of an Ageing Population, Sir Mark Walport and the Lead Expert Group undertook a programme of visits around the United Kingdom. The second of these visits was to Kent on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2014. This roundtable meeting was held in Margate and organised in partnership with the South East England Forum on Ageing.

### **Meeting**

The aim of the roundtable was for Sir Mark Walport, Professor Sarah Harper and Mrs Mary Sinfield to discuss with people in Kent the key challenges, opportunities and visions of their current and future life.

### **Discussion: Key themes**

The issues and themes discussed by attendees are summarised below.

#### **Vision of the future**

- The need for government and community organisations to develop a shared vision of the future for the ageing population; both at the national and local level.
- That a life course approach should be taken when developing policies focused on supporting older adults, and that this should recognise inter-generational issues.
- The need to nurture personal and community resilience to ensure ageing is a positive experience.

#### **Societal attitudes**

- That there appears to be an implicit negative narrative of ageing within society; many younger people do not want to age and many older people do not want to be seen as 'old'. This narrative seems to be fed by the language, messaging and images conveyed in the media, advertising and workplace.
- Public discourse often focuses on the "burden" of an ageing population, in terms of health and social care as well as pensions, rather than on the opportunities and benefits such as skills and experience older people can offer to society.
- Ageing, and a sense of feeling older, is a subjective perception, with some people feeling older or younger than their biological age. Health, income, relationships and personality all play a significant role in determining attendees' subjective age.
- It is important to recognise that the ageing experience is one of transition. Access to advice and support and help with transition throughout the ageing process would be welcome. For example, some attendees reported older people finding that preparation for retirement was complicated by difficulties navigating the pension system and understanding their likely retirement income.
- Individuals in the older population do not all conform to a single profile. It is important to recognise this, and to avoid compartmentalising the population into old and young people.



### Experience of being older

- There is a difference between being lonely and being alone. Loneliness and isolation can be significant issues for the older population. It was suggested that older men may be more vulnerable to loneliness as they often have smaller social networks.
- The 'Broadstairs Town Shed', a social centre aimed at older men was felt to add significant value to older men locally.
- Factors affecting the likelihood of someone experiencing loneliness include reduced mobility, communication, existing social networks, having a sense of purpose, independence, hobbies and existing skills.

### Work and skills

- Many older people possess valuable skills but often cannot access suitable employment opportunities.
- Individuals increasingly change careers during their life. It is important that older adults are able to access learning opportunities. There is a need to ensure people are able to access appropriate training at all stages of their life.

### Housing

- There has been a long history of migration to the UK's coastal areas by people later in life. Many attendees moved to the area because of lower house prices and a perceived better quality of life.
- It is important to ensure that housing is adaptable to changing demographics, including an ageing population.

### Local experiences

- Locally run clubs, organisations and initiatives are available to and valued by older people. There is a need to ensure that local residents and neighbouring communities are aware of them.
- Attendees expressed a preference for receiving information through traditional forms of communication such as newsletters, local newspapers and local radio stations.
- Many of the attendees had moved to the area later in life. The experience and challenges of integrating into a new community were discussed, as well as the experience of being older within a community where significant numbers of people join and leave each year.
- There was a feeling that district localism played a strong part of many people's identity in Kent.



**Attendees**

Mark Walport	Government Chief Scientific Adviser, Government Office for Science
Sarah Harper	University of Oxford and Chair of the Lead Expert Group of the Foresight project on the Future of Ageing
Mary Sinfield	New Dynamics of Ageing Programme and member of the Lead Expert Group of the Foresight project on the Future of Ageing
Christina Stewart	
Derych Knott	
Astrid Brenton	
Margaret Biddles	
Jill Hicks	
Dave Martin	
Mike Pearce	
Paul Letts	
Peter Stockwell	
Bob Giradot	
David Seal	
Peter Harrison	
Jo Dally	Government Office for Science
Nitharna Sivarajah	Government Office for Science
James Pugh	Government Office for Science

*Those not attending in an official capacity were identified with the facilitation of the South East England Forum on Ageing.*